

Friday in the Last Week after Pentecost

November 27, 2020

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Year Two, Proper 29: Revelation 21:22–22:5; Psalm 84:1–6*; Luke 21:29–33*

If Thanksgiving Day fell during a different week this year, yesterday we would have heard these words from the Revelation to John, “And [the angel] called out with a mighty voice, ‘Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!’ ”¹ In the Old Testament, these words are found in Isaiah. In 539 BC, Cyrus, founder of the first Persian Empire, conquers Babylon, then the world's largest city. Cyrus would permit Israel and Judea's exiles to return and rebuild Jerusalem with its walls and temple.²

In the Revelation to John, the words “Fallen, fallen is Babylon; and all the images of her gods he has shattered to the ground,” are words about Rome. John continued, “And [the angel] called out with a mighty voice, ‘[The city] has become a dwelling place of demons, a haunt of every foul spirit, a haunt of every foul and hateful bird.’ ”³

¹ Revelation 18:2a.

² <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Cyrus-the-Great>, (accessed 27 November 2020).

³ Revelation 18:2b.

Today we hear a part of his last vision. John has seen “a new heaven and a new earth . . . and the holy city, new Jerusalem.” Our reading began with what John did not see: “I saw no temple in the city.” ‘The city itself is the temple’⁴—filled by the presence and glory of God and his faithful people, who receive in death the crown of life.⁵

At Daily Morning Prayer, I am used to beginning with the service’s ancient versicle and response: “Lord, open our lips. And our mouth shall proclaim your praise.”⁶ But, if you’ve ever been to church where the main Sunday service most Sundays of the month is Morning Prayer and Sermon, you would be familiar with the minister beginning the service with one or more verses of Scripture.

For Christmastide in the 1928 Prayer Book, there was only one verse appointed, “Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.”⁷ I discovered this morning that there’s now a second verse for the Christmas

⁴ Wilfred J. Harrington, *Revelation*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2008), 215.

⁵ Revelation 2:10.

⁶ *The Book of Common Prayer* (BCP) (1979), 80.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 37, 75; Luke 2:10–11.

Season, not from Matthew or Luke, but Revelation: “Behold, the dwelling of God is with mankind. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them, and be their God.”⁸

Tomorrow the lesson will be the conclusion of Revelation. Today, I want to close with two questions and their answers from the last section of the Catechism in the Prayer Book. The section is called “The Christian Hope.”

“Q. What is the Christian hope? A. The Christian hope is to live with confidence in newness and fullness of life, and to await the coming of Christ in glory, and the completion of God’s purpose for the world.”

“Q. What, then, is our assurance as Christians? A. Our assurance as Christians is that nothing, not even death, shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.”⁹

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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⁸ Ibid., Revelation 21:3.

⁹ Ibid., 861-62.